

Travel experience in hotels for MICE industry

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<p>The following report is a research-oriented bachelor thesis that investigates the travel experience in the business oriented concentrated in MICE Industry.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to assess and measure the level of satisfaction of the MICE travellers in hotels, as well as to find out what are the services and aspects of the hotel that influences the most on the travel experience.</p> <p>The MICE travellers due to the purposes of their visit require specific services from the hotel that are different from what leisure tourists require. The amount of the tourists travelling for meeting, incentive, conference or event purposes is very high, and for some destinations the MICE travellers is the main tourism market.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis is focused on travel experience and the decision making factors and processes.</p> <p>The empirical research was conducted by using quantitative methods. For this study the questionnaire was designed, that has been given to representatives of the MICE Industry during the EIBTM Fair.</p> <p>The results of this thesis are indicating the MICE travellers experiences while staying in the hotel as well as the most significant aspects that influence the decision making process when booking the hotel.</p> <p>The research showed that the most important factors influencing the travel experience are the hotel is the hotel services, good Internet connection and location. As well in the results it is seen that the factors that influence the decision making process are price, location and the hotel chain.</p>	
<p>Keywords Travel experience, Hotels, MICE, Meeting, Incentive, Congresses, Events, Decision making process</p>	

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1 Introduction

This thesis is dedicated to research a travel experience in business oriented hotels for those people who travel for MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Conference and Events) purposes. Business tourism is increasing its popularity every day, and in some cases it becomes the main type of tourism in the destination.

Nowadays business travellers are more experienced when they travel abroad than they were several years ago. These people are more difficult to impress during their stay at the hotel, as they already know all the advantages and disadvantages of being a business traveller, as well as they have certain expectations. The best thing hotels can do for this group of tourists is to be aware of which are their expectations and needs, to do their best in creating a positive experience.

The MICE Industry plays one of the main roles in the development of tourism in many destinations. For MICE travellers, the professionalism of the staff and the infrastructure of the destination are the two most important factors, when it comes to choosing the hotel. The tourists who are travelling for MICE purposes are mainly professionals from a variety of essential industries, such as medicine, engineering, IT, technology, etc. Furthermore, these travellers are known in the tourism and hospitality industry as “big spenders” compared to the leisure tourists.

By conducting the research on what is the MICE travellers experience in the hotels, this thesis aims to respond to the following questions: what are the most important services for business travellers, how satisfied travellers are when staying in a hotel during their business trip, and what can be improved to make their stay more pleasant.

This research is commissioned by the Sales Director of Radisson BLU Hotel Daugava located in the city of Riga, Latvia. One of the main objectives of the hotel is to attract more MICE clients by providing outstanding event facilities and services.

It was agreed with the commissionaire to design a survey, aimed to interview the MICE travellers and gather the data about their experiences in the hotels.

The interviews were held during the EIBTM Fair in the city of Barcelona, between the 27th and the 29th of November 2012. The EIBTM Fair is one of the most important fairs within the Meeting and Events industry. The fair is B2B oriented, and is attended by thousands of industry professionals from all over the world. That is why this was the perfect place to gather reliable and accurate data about the topic.

1.1 Research problem

This research is dedicated to find out what do MICE travellers experience and expect from the hotels, when going on a trip for purposes of business meetings, incentive tours, conferences and congresses, events or exhibitions.

This research aims to identify what aspects of the hotels in general can be improved and developed for this specific group. The commissionaire and the author agreed that the research had to be made, based on a data gathered with the help of the survey. The questions of such survey were designed to find out about the topic of this thesis and answer the research problems.

This thesis strives to research the following questions:

- What is the reservation process?
- What are the main factors when choosing a hotel for MICE purposes?
- What is the travel experience from the hotels?
- What are necessary services in the hotel for the MICE segment?

1.2 Aims, objectives and limitations

The MICE Industry is one of the most important sectors of tourism, which brings a big amount of income and creates a positive image of the destination. This thesis has the goal to research what are the experiences that MICE travellers have when travelling for business, meetings, incentive, etc. Moreover, the thesis aims to determine, the fac-

tors,- that affect the decision-making process,- when making the reservation of the hotel,- and the aspects that are directly affecting the travel experience and hotel image.

The objective of this thesis is to concentrate the research on tourists who usually travel for MICE purposes and are familiar with the word. Following this objective it was decided to hold the interviews during the EIBTM Fair 2012 in Barcelona, which gathers annually professionals from the MICE Industry. The people who attend the fair are experienced travellers, familiar with the term of MICE tourism and are able to provide the author with reliable and accurate information.

The results of this thesis are aimed to be presented to the commissionaire informing on travel experience in the hotels for MICE tourism segment. The results of the research are expected to be useful not only for the commissionaire party but also for any business oriented hotel, whose objective is the development of the provided services. Thus, the results and its analysis are creating a base for the further research of the topic, which can get more in depth of the problem, if the commissioner party or any other organization interested.

There were several limitations during the research process. First, the work was written and conducted being away from the HAAGA-HELIA University, making the communication with the supervisor a challenge. Second, there were limitations concerning the theoretical sources, as the research was performed in Spain and most of the books were taken from the National Library of Catalonia, which has very limited information available in English on the related topic.

It was planned to gather about 100-150 answers, but unfortunately it was only possible to collect 64 answers from the fair visitors, due to the short period of time, and because the EIBTM Fair is B2B oriented, and therefore it was very challenging to get more people for the interviews as most of them had scheduled appointments.

1.3 Approach and research methods

The data for the research is collected from primary and secondary sources. This thesis combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods in collecting the primary data.

The primary data was collected using the survey which consisted of open and closed ended questions. The survey was conducted through face to face interviews during the EIBTM Fair in Barcelona.

The qualitative method is used to collect data about the hotel, its organizational structure and data about their participation in the fair, as well as to gather the information about the respondent's travel experience in hotels. To gather this information interviews, both, formal and informal are used.

The quantitative research method is used to gather information from a target group, which in this case are the visitors and exhibitors of the EIBTM fair. The reason why people working in the MICE industry are set as a target group is that it is assumed that they are more familiar with travel experience in hotels, when travelling for business purposes.

For this research there has been created a theoretical framework using the secondary sources, such as books and the Internet, which provides a variety of articles and statistics used for completing theoretical knowledge related to the topic.

1.4 Report Structure

This report is divided into seven different entities. First, in chapter number two it is presented the information about the commissionaire party of the research, followed by the third chapter which is dedicated to represent the theoretical framework of the research. This chapter opens up the concepts and figures that are relevant to the research field of the thesis.

The theoretical framework of the research is based on describing such terms as travel experience, customer satisfaction and decision making process and factors. Following the structure there is presented the information and background about MICE industry.

After the theoretical part of the work, there is a chapter dedicated to describe the research methods. This chapter represents the methods that were used when collecting the data, and how it has been analysed as well as validity and reliability of the research. The research methods are presented in chapter number five.

The next chapter presents and discusses the result of the survey and the analysis, followed by the concluding chapter. The last entity of the thesis is presenting the final conclusions of the work as well as the suggestions, and personal learning outcomes.

2 Radisson BLU Daugava Hotel

This chapter presents the information about the commissionaire party, the Radisson Blu Daugava Hotel. The following paragraphs describe the facts about the hotel, its aims and its interest towards the research topic.

The commissioner of this thesis is Radisson BLU Daugava Hotel, a four star superior hotel, which is located in Riga, Latvia, on the bank of the Daugava River, overlooking the famous Old City of Riga.

The hotel was the first in the Baltic countries that became managed by the international hotel brand since Latvia regained the second independence in the year 1991. The hotel is oriented not only for leisure tourists, but also for business tourists, and MICE segments.

One of the aims of the hotel is to bring in more business travellers, and especially those who are willing to hold their events in the hotel facilities. In other words, the hotel is interested in MICE travellers to choose this hotel instead of others, to organize events and host the visitors of the same events.

By commissioning this thesis the hotel will be able to know what is the travel experience of people in hotels when travelling for businesses, and what are the factors that are influencing the decision making process about the hotel booking.

The objective of the commissionaire hotel is acknowledging with the results of the research, and utilizes them in order to develop their services.

2.1 MICE Services in Radisson BLU Daugava Hotel

For business travellers, the hotel offers Business Class Rooms as well as continent and efficient services required by these types of clients. The room includes additional amenities, such as bathrobe and slippers, daily newspaper, in-room safe, iron and iron-

ing board, Nespresso coffee machine and complimentary in-house movies as well the free of charge Internet connection (Radisson BLU, 2013).

For those clients who are staying in the hotel for MICE purposes, the hotel has 13 modern meeting rooms, including one of the largest meeting spaces in Latvia. The hotel has available rooms for small gatherings and large conferences. All meeting facilities are equipped to the highest standards, with additional audio –visual equipment and translation services upon request. Professional, multilingual event management team works in the hotel in order to ensure the success of the events. In addition, the hotel has a fitness club, which features a 24-meter indoor swimming pool, sauna, aerobic studio, solarium, massage and vitamin bar. Additionally, guests and visitors of the hotel can spend their free time in the SPA Zone salon (Radisson BLU Daugava Hotel, 2012).

Radisson BLU Daugava Hotel also offers some concept services which bring additional value for those clients who are staying for business purposes. These services include: free Internet, Grab&Run – the breakfast service for those guests who do not have enough time to have a sit-down meal, the hotel offers tea and coffee, along with fresh fruits and energy bars; Express Checkout – for those guests who are in a rush, the hotel offers the option of sending the invoice by email or a quick pick-up at the reception counter; Express Laundry – the laundry is done in 3 hours.

3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework presented in the following chapters is divided into three parts. The first part discusses what tourist experience is, the second part is dedicated to specify what customer satisfaction is and its importance for the organization, and the third and last part defines what is decision-making process and what factors are influencing this process.

3.1 Travel Experience

The concept of travel experience is rather abstract, this phenomenon refers to something special that travellers can talk about when they return back home. For any tourist destination, hotel, Destination Management Company (DMC), restaurant and many other organizations involved in the tourism and hospitality industry, the awareness of what travel or tourist experience they bring to the customer is one of the main priorities. The knowledge about customer's experience is the key for developing the business, image and marketing strategies of the organization.

There are various definitions about what is travel experience, and they will be discussed in the following chapter. This chapter describes the theoretical information about travel experience and its importance in the hospitality industry.

Nowadays, experience is a new source of value. The society of consumers is seeking not only for a good quality product or service, but for the outstanding and unique experience which will last for a life time. Usually people tend to look for the experience in the service oriented sectors.

When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf, but when he or she buys an experience, he pays to enjoy a series of memorable events that company stages – as in a theatrical play – to engage him in an inherently personal way. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 3)

As tourism is the service oriented industry, people who travel either for leisure or business purposes, are looking for an experience that will be different and memorable. In the past decades the whole entertainment industry tried to offer to customers their uniqueness and new experiences that none had chance to see before, for example theme restaurants, such as Hard Rock Café or Benihana, theme parks like Disneyland or even theme hotels like Ice Hotel in Sweden.

The companies, or in the case of this research the hotels, are being called by Pine and Gilmore the *experience stager* – they no longer offer goods or services alone but the resulting experience, rich with sensations, created within each customer. All prior economic offerings remain at arm's length, outside the buyers, but experiences are inherently personal. They actually occur within any individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 17).

As the result, we can claim that there are no two people with the same experiences. Each experience is created from the interaction between the staged events and the individual's prior state of mind and being. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 17)

Although experiences are intangible, people still desire to get them, due the reason that those things and memories stay with them through their lives. Psychologists Travis Carter and Thomas Gilovich had determined that positive experiences make people happier, with a greater sense of well-being, than purchasing goods (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 17).

Hotels that are applying the knowledge and data about the tourist experience not only earn their place in the hearts of their customers, but also they are creating a positive image of their company, attracting more customers, and working on their satisfaction and loyalty.

3.2 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most essential components of any business. If the customer is satisfied it is more likely that he or she will return seeking for the same experience or advice it to others. In the recent years, many organizations consider the phenomena of customer satisfaction very serious.

There has been given many different names to the definition of customer satisfaction, among which are customer loyalty, customer relationships, customer experience, and much more. However the word “satisfaction” is the most appropriate label for the range of attitudes and feelings that customer hold about their experience with an organization (Hill, Roche & Allen, 2). Shwarc in his book sets following definition on what is customer satisfaction:

Customer satisfaction is how customers view an organization’s products or services in light of their experiences with that organization (or product), as well as by comparison with what they have heard or seen about other companies or organizations (Swarc, 6).

Customer attitudes are massively important to all organizations since they determine the customers’ future behaviour (Hill, Roche & Allen, 2). In case of the topic of the research, the customer satisfaction of the business hotel services is discussed. If the guests are satisfied with the services of the hotel, it means longer stays, choosing to use more services and recommending it to others. Customer satisfaction directly leads to organization profitability. Satisfied customers are more likely to ‘promote’ the company, because satisfaction is something people talk about (Swarc, 12).

Customers have certain standards and expectations when in mind prior; they observe the service performance, compare it to their standard, and finally form the satisfaction judgment when comparing with earlier expectations (Levolock & Wirtz, 44)

3.3 Decision-making process and factors

This chapter explains what is motivational and decision making factors that makes tourist choose certain products and services. This chapter is dedicated to understand why people decide to choose one hotel, instead of another.

Tourism motivation is a part of the consumption process and is stimulated by a complex mixture of economic, social, psychological, cultural, political, industry related and wider environmental influence (Page & Connel, 63).

The tourism decision-making process is affected by personal, behavioural and destination-specific qualities, as well as the exogenous factors influencing demand (Page & Connel, 64). These includes:

- Social and personal interaction, such as needs of others with whom the individual is travelling.
- Travel experience, expectation of delays, comfort and ease of travel destination.
- Destination-specific factors, such as quality of accomodation and facilities.
- Personal factors, such as self-confidence, personality, experience, lifestyle and life-stage.

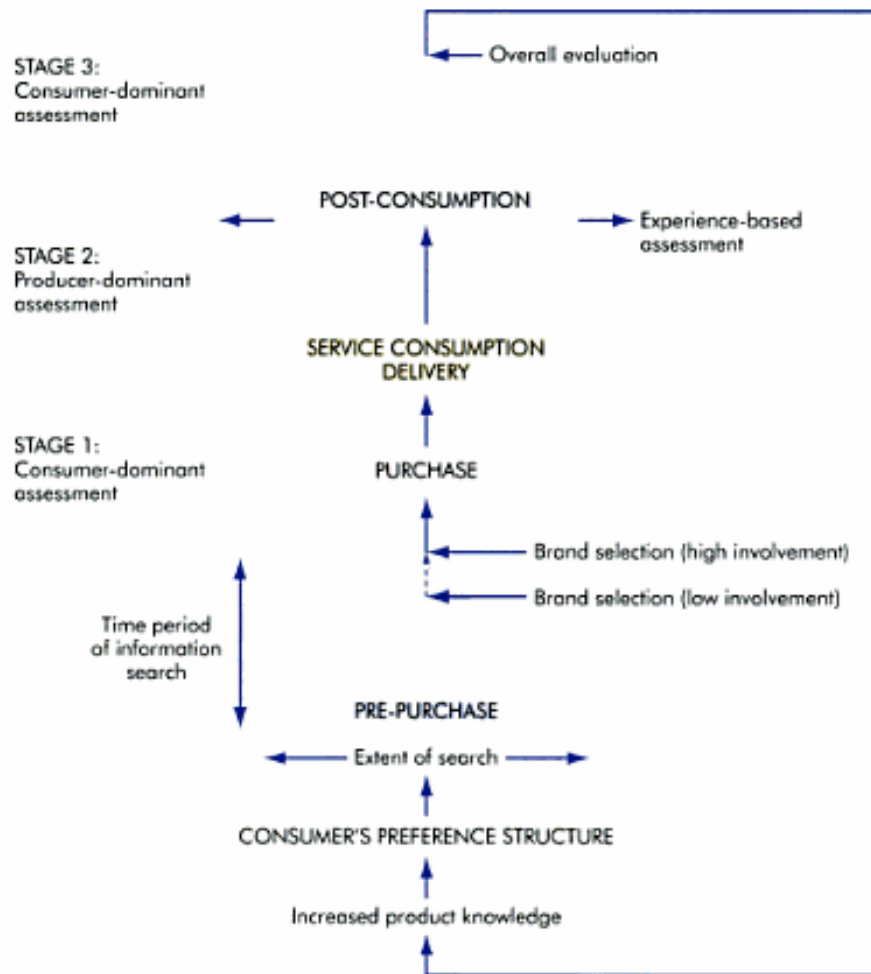


Figure 1. The consumer decision process for hospitality service (Page & Connel, 65)

4 MICE Industry

MICE stands for Meetings Incentive Conferences and Exhibitions. This acronym is used to describe the particular type of tourism group, usually this group travel for a particular purpose. MICE tourists usually have their trip well planned in advanced, and they require specific services. In recent years, the MICE acronym is also used as Meeting Industry or Event Industry.

4.1 What is MICE Industry

To highlight purposes relevant to the *meetings industry*, if a trip's main purpose is business/professional, it can be further subdivided into "attending meetings, conferences or congresses, trade fairs and exhibitions" and "other business and professional purposes".

The term *meetings industry* is preferred by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and Reed Travel over the acronym *MICE* (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) which does not recognize the industrial nature of such activities. (WTO)

4.2 MICE segment in tourism

The MICE term in different literature is referred as business tourism, conventional tourism, or event tourism. This chapter is representing the theoretical knowledge about the phenomena by comparing and combining the information about it from a variety of different sources.

MICE industry is one of the fastest growing segments within the tourism industry, generating millions in revenues for cities and countries. Europe and The United States still remain as the major markets worldwide regarding the number of meetings, conferences and exhibitions (Travel Daily News).

The emerging markets in Europe are predominately Eastern European countries, such as Russia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Romania and Poland, which are all showing increasing demand for meeting and incentive travel (Travel Daily News).

Business travel comprises all trips which purpose is linked with the traveller's employment or business interests. These trips may be necessary in order to enable actual work to be carried out; or they may enable the employee to learn how to do their job more effectively; or they may be given by the employer as a reward for a well done job (Davidson, 4).

MICE industry travellers are travelling to the certain destination, choosing them by its location and provided infrastructure on the place. The most preferable destinations for MICE travellers are big metropolis and capitals.

Cities are the places where the head offices, factories, and conference and exhibition centres are located. They are also the places where the majority of the facilities that support the business travel market can be found, e.g. hotels, transport termini and cultural/entertainment resources used by business visitors (Davidson, 10).

As it was mentioned before in the introduction, the MICE market has already become the main tourist market. Business travellers tend to spend more money on the tourism services, which means that it brings a great income to the economy of the destination. The potential earnings from the various forms of the business travel can be considerable, both for the individual companies who supply this market, and for the towns and cities where people travel for business. Thus, the high-quality, high-yield end of the tourism spectrum, often characterised by lavish spending, and often bringing large numbers of high-spending visitors who by the time the event is over, have left many of the destination's cash registers full to the brim (Davidson, 14).

It has long been recognised that due to the higher spending levels associated with business travel, it has greater per capita value than leisure tourism in securing employment and other economic benefits.

5 Research

This chapter represents the research methods that were used to collect and analyse the data. Also it describes the survey which was created for the research, followed by the overview of the reliability and validity of the methods.

5.1 Research methods

The research methods are chosen, taking into consideration the target group and time limitation. The empirical data of the research was collected using a quantitative and qualitative survey questions.

A qualitative approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses post positivist claims for developing knowledge (i.e. cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses and question, use of measurement and observation, and the test of theories), employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data (Creswell 2003, 18). The qualitative approach uses following employ methods: closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches and numeric data (Creswell 2003, 19).

The qualitative approach method is used in the research to test or verify theories or explanations identify variables to study, relate variables in questions or hypothesis, use standards of validity and reliability, observe and measure information numerically, use unbiased approaches and to employ statistical procedures (Creswell 2002, 19).

In quantitative studies, one uses theory deductively and places it toward the beginning of the plan for a study. With the objective of testing or verifying a theory rather than developing it, the researcher advances a theory collects data to test it, and reflects on the confirmation or disconfirmation of the theory by the results (Creswell, 2003, 125).

In this research quantitative methods were used to collect the data about the set research problems and to get more in-depth knowledge about the problem. To gather information using the quantitative research method the open-ended questions were

designed. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents to give more detailed information about the topic.

All the secondary data for this research was collected through literature related to tourism, MICE industry, hospitality and marketing, also the Internet was used in order to gather and extent the theoretical framework of the research.

5.2 The survey

This survey aims to take a look at what are the services that are most valuable and sufficient for the MICE travellers and what are the challenges that they come across when going on a business trip. The survey allows to see what influences the decision making process when doing a hotel reservation.

Analysing the answers of the business travellers, the author of the research will see if there is any improvements that can be made to influence the decision-making process and the travel experience in general.

The survey also researches about the visitors of the EIBTM fair, what is their background, how often they visit the fairs related to MICE industry, and how do they organize meetings during the fair. This information is gathered for the commissionaire of the work, in order to give an insight of the advantages and opportunities of the fair.

The data of the research was collected between the 27th and the 29th of November 2012 during the EIBTM – The Global Meeting and Events Exhibitor in Barcelona. The place of conducting the interviews was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the commissionaire party participates in the fair every year. Secondly, the author of the research at that moment was in Barcelona and it was a great opportunity to the commissionaire party and the author to meet during the fair. Lastly, the EIBTM fair is one of the biggest events in Europe concentrated and dedicated to MICE industry professionals.

The survey included the questions on the background information of the respondents, such as age group, nationality, gender, and the position held in the company in order to see whether those factors influence the results or not. The background information was also used to see the correlations between the respondents' background and their answers.

The survey consisted of open and close ended questions. The close questions consisted in multiple choice questions and the open ended questions were designed including qualitative data to support the closed ended questions as well as the theory.

The survey was designed and conducted with the help of the commissionaire which brought the professional knowledge and interest. The collaboration with the commissionaire affected the development and improvement of the survey questions.

5.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important concepts to consider when conducting the research; the following chapter explains what those concepts are. Although the terms of reliability and validity seem to be almost synonyms, they have quite different meanings in relation to the evaluation of measures of concepts.

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept. The reliability of the research is how reliable the results of the research are. Reliability is also commonly linked to whether the results of the research are repeatable (Bryman & Bell 2007, 40).

Validity refers to the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept (Bryman & Bell 2007, 165). Validity refers to the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from the research (Bryman & Bell 2007, 164).

In this research a total of 64 people were interviewed, it was enough answers to analyse the common trends. It was planned to get about 100 answers to make the research results more reliable, but as the target group was limited it was decided not to gather

more results, than it was collected during the EIBTM fair. The fact that all the interviewees had ample information about the MICE industry and great experience of travelling and staying in hotels for business purposes increases the reliability of the results.

The validity of the research might have suffered in some parts, due the fact that the survey was conducted during B2B trade fair, where people had arranged meetings, conferences and presentation, so they were hardly interested in dedicating their time to answering questions.

Additionally, due the location of the fair many respondents were locals from Spain and in some cases, questions had to be translated to Spanish, which might have affected the understanding of the question.

Furthermore, the negative factors of the destination affected the results, when the respondents were asked about the hotel services, as most of the respondents gave their opinions relaying to their most recent experience.

6 Results of the research

This chapter presents and analyses the results of the survey, discussing the background information gathered with a designed questionnaire about the respondents. This is followed by presenting the results which are divided into several sections corresponding to the research problem.

6.1 Survey results

The total amount of 100 copies was printed out. 64 questionnaires were answered during the EIBTM Travel Fair in Barcelona. The results were gathered by face-to-face interview with the respondents. The interviews were done by the author of the thesis and some of them by the commissionaire of the thesis during the fair.

The results of the research will be presented section by section in the following chapters. Each chapter will introduce the discussed problem and present questions that answer the research problem.

6.1.1 Background information

This section presents the background information about the respondents, which was asked in the first 4 questions of the questionnaire. The questions about the background information were the following: gender, age, country of origin, position in the company and frequency of travelling for MICE purposes. Those questions were asked in order to see how the background of the respondents influences the results.

Gender

The majority of the respondents were males, with a number of 39 male interviewees, and 24 females, making it 60, 9% to 39, 1%.

Age Groups

Respondents were asked to define the age group that they belong to. There were five different age groups: from 18 to 25, from 26 to 35, from 36 to 45, from 46 to 55 and over 56 years old. The results are the following:

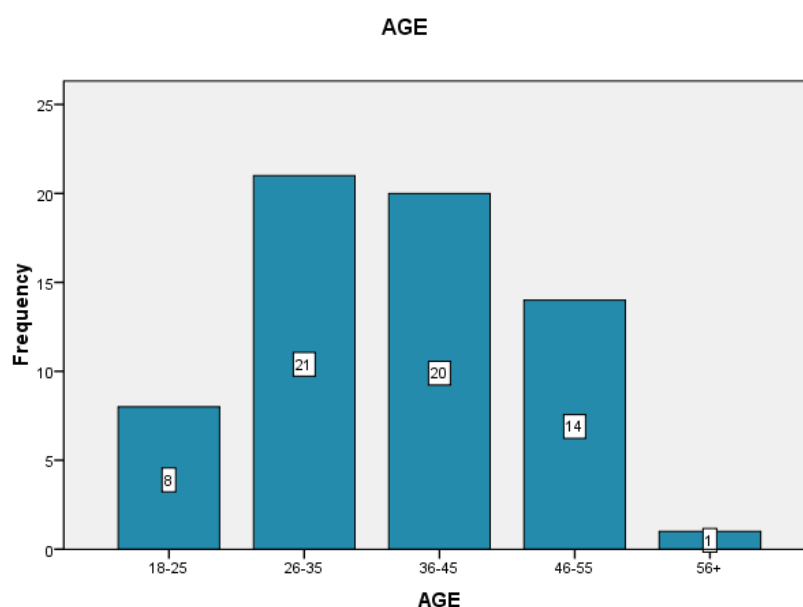


Figure 2. Age groups

Country of origin

Question number three was focused on the information about the country of origin of the respondents. The results are presented in Table 1. The majority of the respondents were originally from Spain, as the interviews were taken in this country.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Argentina	1	1,6	1,6	1,6
Belgium	2	3,1	3,1	4,7
China	2	3,1	3,1	7,8
Egypt	2	3,1	3,1	10,9
Finland	2	3,1	3,1	14,1
France	2	3,1	3,1	17,2
Germany	7	10,9	10,9	28,1

Greece	1	1,6	1,6	29,7
India	2	3,1	3,1	32,8
Italy	3	4,7	4,7	37,5
Japan	1	1,6	1,6	39,1
Jordan	2	3,1	3,1	42,2
Latvia	2	3,1	3,1	45,3
Lithuania	1	1,6	1,6	46,9
Mexico	2	3,1	3,1	50,0
Poland	1	1,6	1,6	51,6
Portugal	1	1,6	1,6	53,1
Russia	3	4,7	4,7	57,8
Slovakia	1	1,6	1,6	59,4
Spain	14	21,9	21,9	81,3
Sweden	1	1,6	1,6	82,8
Switzerland	1	1,6	1,6	84,4
Tanzania	1	1,6	1,6	85,9
Turkey	3	4,7	4,7	90,6
Ukraine	1	1,6	1,6	92,2
United Kingdom	5	7,8	7,8	100,0
Total	64	100,0	100,0	

Table 1. Country of origin.

Position in the company

Question number four required the respondents to indicate their current position in the company they are working for. This question was asked in order to see how the occupied position influences the results. There were given 5 options and one answer was “other” if the respondent could not indicate any of the answers. The results are demonstrated in Figure 3.

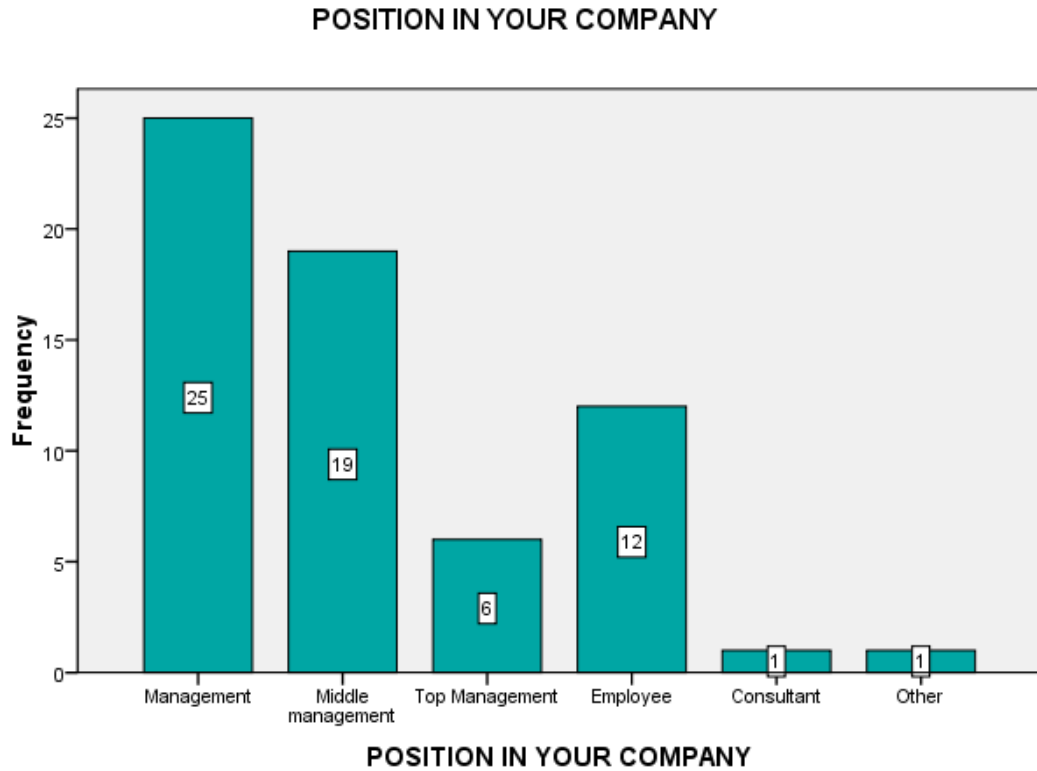


Figure 3. Position in the company

The majority of the respondents occupied management or middle management positions in the company. 12 of the respondents were employees and 6 were top managers of the company.

Frequency of travelling for MICE purposes

This question was focused on learning how often the respondents are travelling for MICE purposes a year, which is an important data that influence the travel experience in the hotels. The results of the question are described below in Figure 4.

The results show that the majority of the respondents are travelling for the MICE purposes less than 10 times a year. Others travel between 11 to 20 times and 21 to 30 times. Few respondents travel more than 31 times a year.

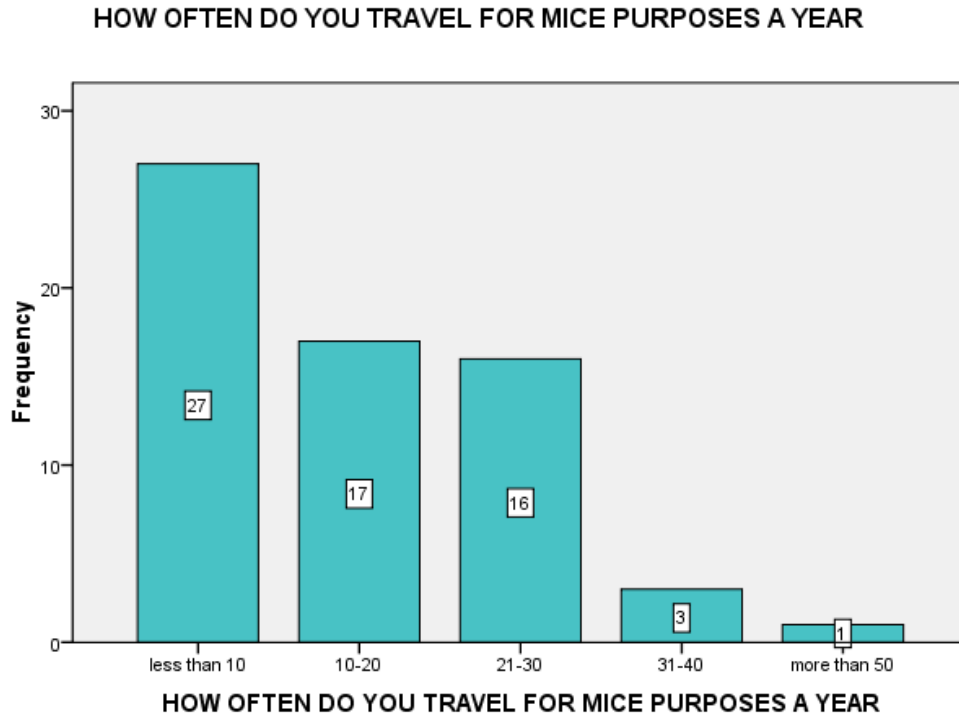


Figure 4. Frequency of travelling for MICE purposes

6.1.2 Hotel reservation process

There was a question about how is the reservation process made. The main focus of this question was on how do the companies or individuals book the hotel when traveling for business. The commissionaire of the research was interested on what is the most popular way of doing the reservation. Figures bellow presents the results and also differentiates if how does the background of the respondents influence their choice.

Figure 5 shows that the biggest part of the respondents are making their reservation through the Internet, 23,4% of respondents are making their reservations directly through the hotel and 14,06% are using the services of the local destination management companies to book the hotel.

In this question the background did not seem to influence the results. Despite all the background factors the answers were the same and the Internet was the most named answer.

HOW IS MADE THE RESERVATION OF THE HOTEL

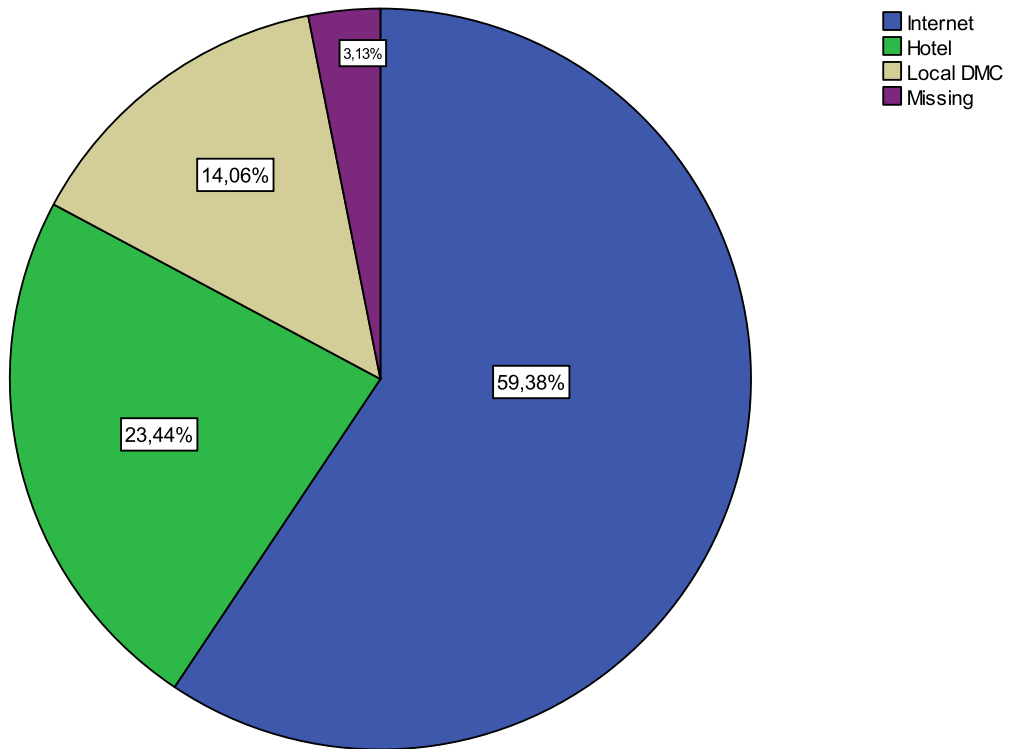


Figure 5. Reservation of the hotel

6.1.3 Hotel services for MICE travellers

Two questions of the survey are dedicated to learn about what services are essential for MICE travellers. In the first question respondents were asked to indicate what are the aspects they pay attention to, when booking the hotel. Second question asked the interviewees to answer what are the most outstanding aspects of the hotel. The results of those questions are demonstrated bellow.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A HOTEL

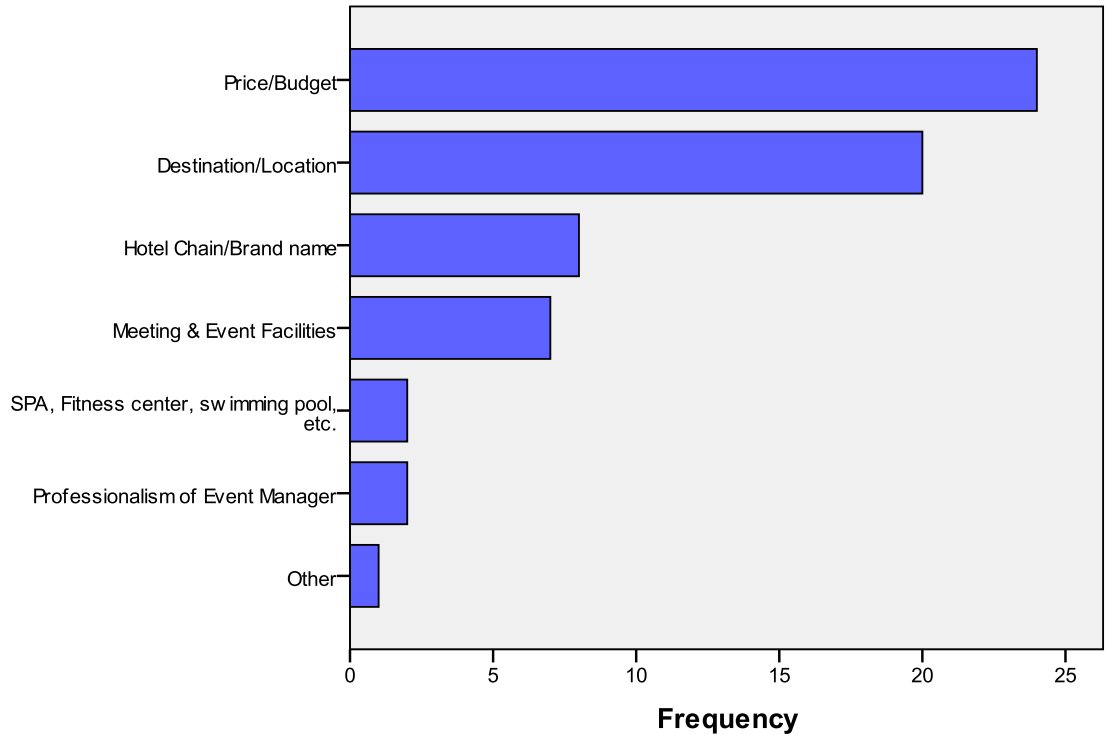


Figure 6. Main criteria for choosing hotel

The Figure 6 shows that the main criteria with 37,5% of response for choosing the hotel for MICE is price or set budget. For 31,3% destination or location of the hotel plays important role, as it has to be easy and convenient to reach the airport, conventions centres or other infrastructures from the hotel. 12,5% of respondents answered that they are choosing the hotel by their brand or the hotel chain name. This aspect is important for the loyal customers of the certain hotel chain. Only 10,9% answered that they choose the hotel for its meeting and event facilities and the rest answered that there are others aspects important when booking the hotel.

In this question the author saw the correlation between the position held in the company and the answers about what are the most important criteria for choosing the hotel. The results are demonstrated in the Figure 7 below:

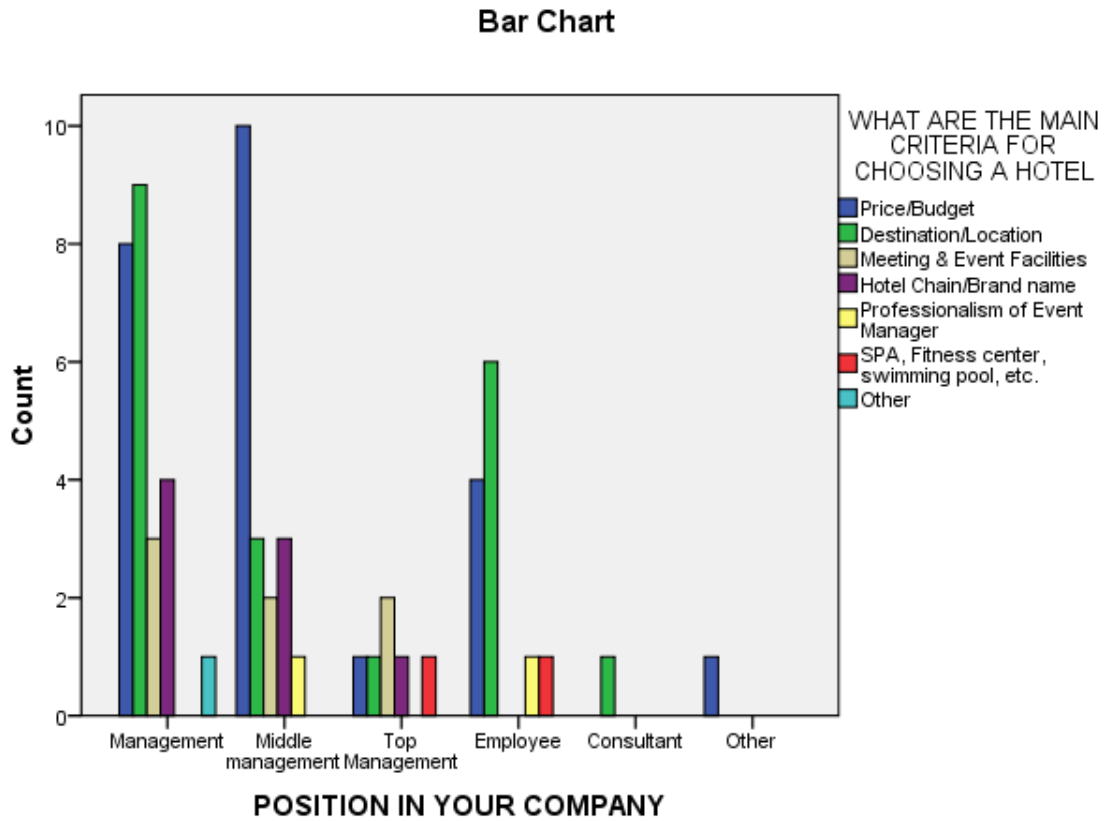


Figure 7. Criteria for choosing the hotel for different positions in the company.

Figure 7 shows that for the managerial position the main criterion is the destination. For the middle management it is the price, for the top management the meeting and event facilities are the most important aspect and for the employees the hotel destination or the location plays the main role when booking the hotel.

Figure 8 below represents the chart of what are the most outstanding aspects of the hotel for business travellers. This question is focused on what are the factors that influence the most the travel experience and make them remember the hotel. The majority of the respondents (44,4%) answered that the most memorable aspect of their stay in the hotel is service. 19% answered that catering is very important to have a good experience. Hotel design is important for 12,7%, problem solving ability and the staff of the hotel both are important for 11% of respondents.

MOST OUTSTANDING ASPECTS IN THE HOTELS

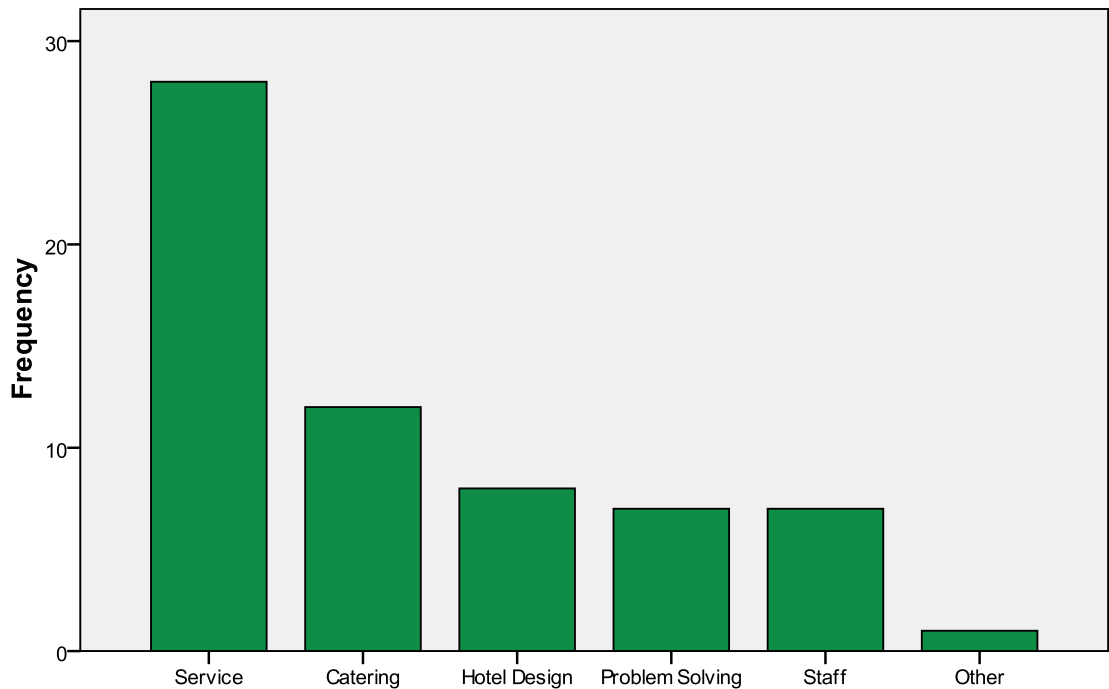


Figure 8. Most outstanding aspects in the hotel

6.1.4 Customer satisfaction

The question number nine was a closed-ended question which asked the respondents how satisfied they are with the hotel that they are staying at the moment. There were only three possible answers given: Very Satisfied, Satisfied and Unsatisfied. Majority of people was satisfied with their hotel, 18% were very satisfied, 1% was unsatisfied and 16 answers were missing as those people were locals and did not stay in the hotel.

6.1.5 Travel Experience in business oriented hotels

To learn more about what is the Travel Experience of people in business oriented hotels it was decided to ask an open-ended questions, where people could express what aspects are creating positive travel experience and which are most likely to leave a negative travel experience of the hotel stay. As the travel experience depends a lot on

providing by the hotel services and details, those three questions was made an open-ended in order to give a chance to each individual to express their opinion.

There were three open-ended questions. The first and the second questions were focused on what are positive and negative aspects of the hotels that respondents stay at the moment. The third question asked the respondents to name three most important aspects of the hotel for MICE tourists. The answers of the questions were analyzed and combined in two different. As the answers mostly were given as a one word or word pair it was easy to combine and analyze them.

To analyse the answers there was made four different charts which are demonstrated below. First two charts demonstrate the experience from the hotel that the respondents were staying at the moment of their stay in Barcelona; these charts demonstrate what aspect influenced their experience in a positive or a native way.

Third chart represents what in respondent's opinion are the most essential services and aspect for the MICE industry travellers, and finally last table represents the total of all the aspects and services mentioned in the open-ended questions.

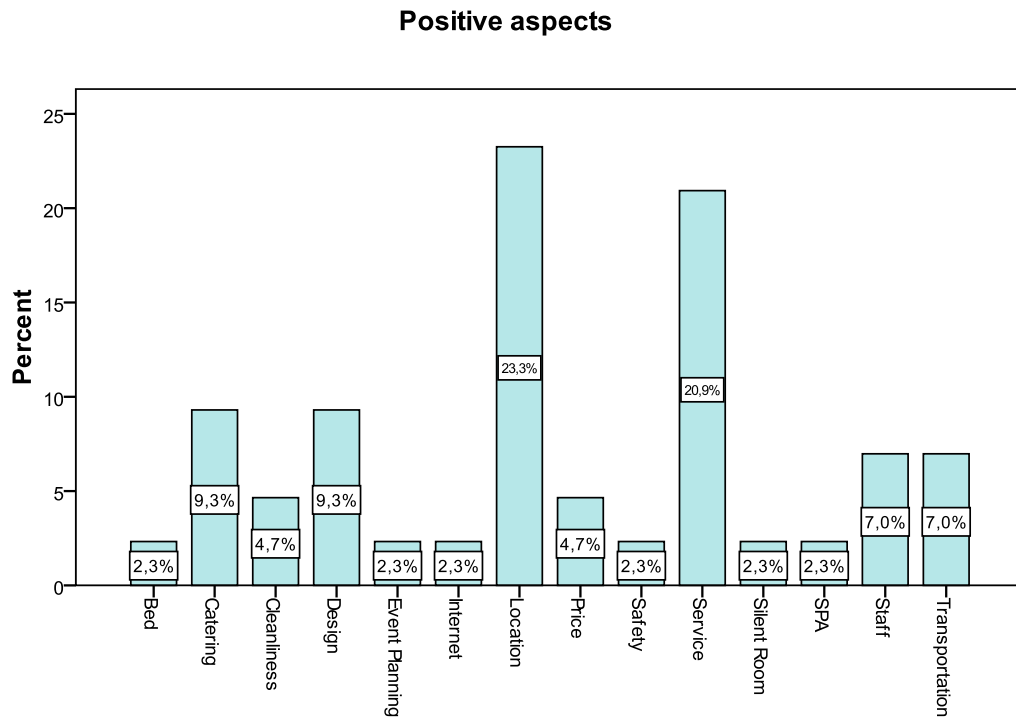


Figure 9. Positive aspects of the hotel.

Figure 9 represents the analyzed open-ended answers from the question number ten: what aspects are good in the hotel you are currently allocated.

The figure shows that the aspect that influenced the most the positive travel experience was the location of the hotel with the amount of 23,3% of responds. The second most important aspect was the service provided by the hotel with 20,9% of similar replies. Other important aspects of the hotels that make the good impression on the guests are hotel's catering and design with 9,3% of the positive responds, as well as the hotel staff and transportation services with 7% each. The rest of the aspects represented in the chart are having less importance, but still are remarkable for some individuals.

Negative aspects

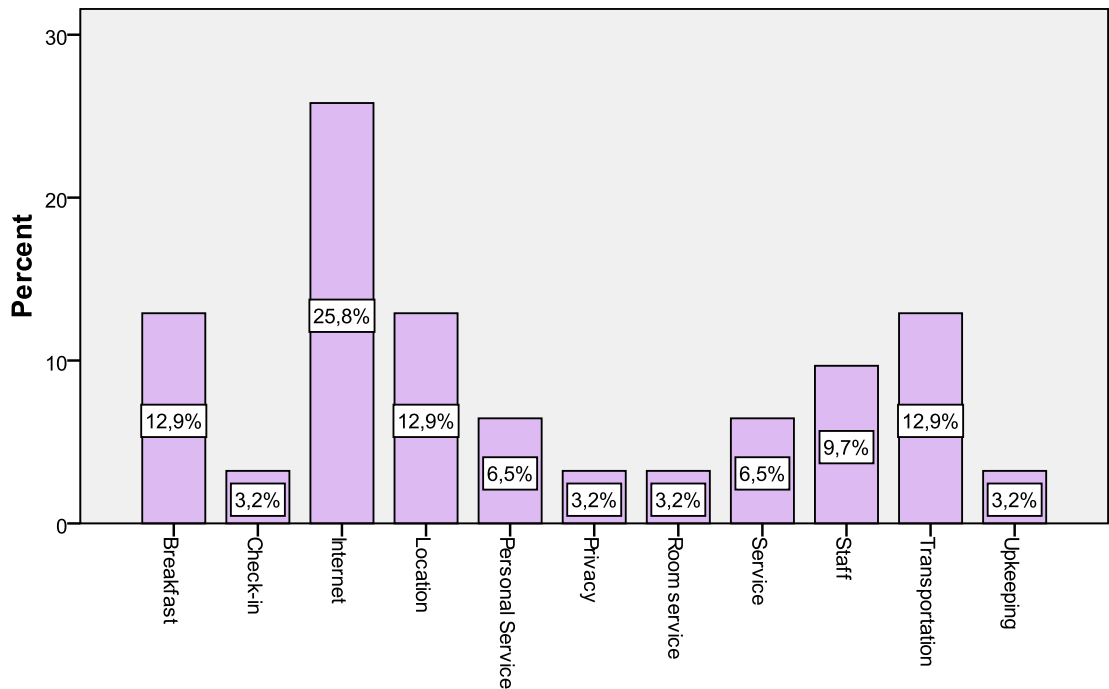


Figure 10. Negative aspects of the hotel.

The Figure 10 represents the answers of the question number 11 about, what can be improved in the hotel of your stay.

The majority of the respondents 25,8% answered the Internet Connections in the hotel can be improves. The second most popular answers were – breakfast, location and transportation to the hotel with 12,9% of answers each. Other important aspects that influenced the experience of the hotel in a negative way were hotel staff, lack of personal service and hotel service in general. The rest of the responds had less popularity, bus as well were important for some hotel guests.

MICE Services

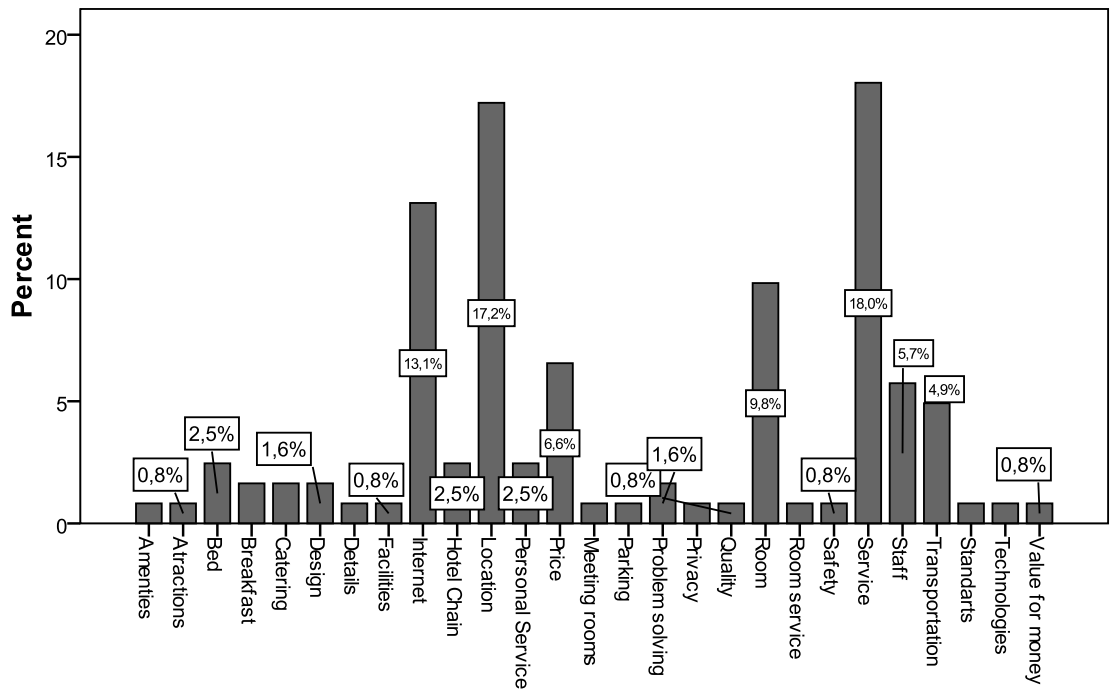


Figure 11. Important MICE services in hotels

The question number twelve asked the respondents to name the three most important aspects of services of the hotel for the MICE industry traveller.

The majority of the respondents indicated service and hotel location as one of the most important factors of the hotel which is oriented for the MICE segment. Other important aspects are: price, room, hotel staff and easy transportation to the hotel.

Total aspects metioned

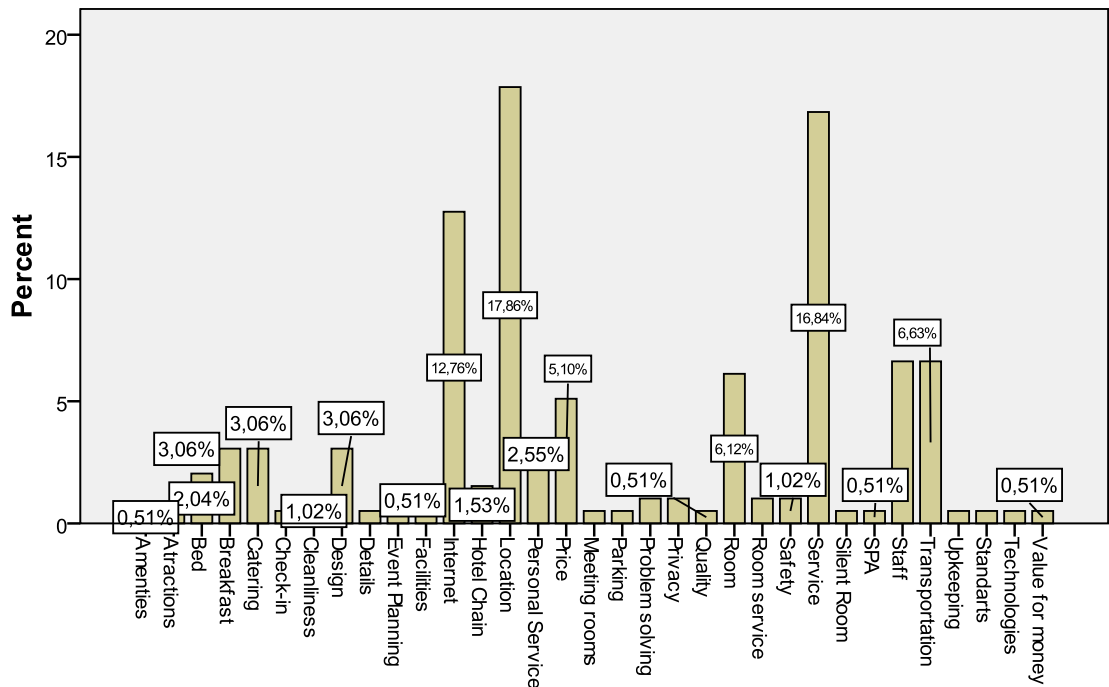


Figure 8. Total amount of the mentions

The last figures represent all the factors that were mentioned during the interview. All those factors are somehow influencing the hotel experience and are important for the specific sector of the MICE travellers.

As it is show the most important aspects are the location, hotel service and good Internet connection, other factors that are important for the business travellers are price, staff and easy transportation to the hotel and around the destination.

7 Conclusion and discussion

This thesis aimed to find out what is the travel experience in the business oriented hotels for the MICE industry travellers. The main focus of the research was to look at the services and hotel facilities that influence the experience the most, as well as to see what aspects do influence the decision making when doing the hotel reservation.

The hotels that aim to attract the MICE segment have to take in consideration the specific of provided services for these particular customer groups. The MICE market has its specifics when it comes to the hotel service and facilities, and the guests have special requirements that might be very different from the leisure travellers. For MICE travellers is important the hotel location, good transportation, high quality service in the hotel and good Internet connection in the hotel, as well it is necessary for them to have a good breakfast and quite rooms with a comfortable bed.

Most of the MICE travellers combine their work and leisure time while staying in the hotel, which means that the hotel facilities such as SPA, gym and swimming pool adds extra value to their stay and overall experience.

When travelling for business the most important aspects for the customers are the price and the location of the hotel especially for the lower level managers. The hotel chain or a hotel brand name is also very important as many companies are participating in the customer loyalty programs and for them it is more beneficial to choose the hotel of the preferred chain.

For the hotel the positive travel experience or their satisfaction is very important, as it helps not only to create the positive image of the hotel, but as well maximize the size of the return client and the further positive recommendations of the same hotel to the colleagues and friends. Usually when the customers are not satisfied with their stay, they choose to not come back to the same place.

Nowadays, unsatisfied clients can ruin the hotel reputation very fast using the social media to express on public complains and discuss all the negative sides of the hotel. Those negative comments are seen by all the travel agencies and potential clients from all over the world, which can seriously damage the business.

7.1 Key findings and analysis of the results

This section of the research work presents main findings of the research and analyses the results that answers the research problem of this thesis.

According to the answers of the respondents about what is the most preferable way to make the hotel reservation, the majority of the interviewees choose to make the reservation through the Internet, using the webpages that provides booking services. Other respondents prefer to contact the hotel directly for all the arrangements or to contact local Destination Management Company.

In general the choice of the reservation intermediary depends a lot on the complexity of the reservation. If the client is making the reservation for a big group of people the person in charge of the trip prefers to contact hotel directly. Clients who are planning to hold an event or are participating in some events on the destination are most likely to choose to contact the local DMC in order to facilitate the reservation process of the hotel, event venues and also the overall trip organization together with planning process.

The results of the survey show that the main criterion for choosing the hotel is the price or the budget of the company set for the certain trip or event. Another essential factor that influences the booking decision of the MICE traveller is the location of the hotel. The location of the hotel plays one of the major roles for the meetings, conferences and events. The MICE travellers are also paying a great attention to the hotel chain or the brand name of the hotel located in the destination they plan to visit. Because many companies are taking part in the loyalty programmes of the certain hotel chains, the fact that they could benefit from the booking, influences the decision making process. As well meeting and event facilities are important aspects when choosing

the hotel as many companies prefer to have their events organized in the same hotel rather than in the outside facilities. However, only 10% of respondents are choosing the hotel on the first place for its meeting and event facilities. The least important aspects of the hotel that influence the decision are SPA, Fitness centres, swimming pool and other facilities of the hotel, as well as the professionalism of the event manager. The professionalism of the event manager is not that important for the decision making process due to the fact that company cannot know the level of the professionalism unless they have already been in the hotel and have worked together.

To take more in-depth knowledge about the decision-making factors it was decided to see in the cross tables if the background factors influence the criteria of choosing the hotel. With the help of the cross table presenting the correlation between the position held in the company and what are the main criterion for choosing the hotel it can be seen that those criteria varies for different people.

For the people taking manager positions in the company the main criteria for choosing the hotel are location and price. For the middle managers the most important aspect is the price or the budget. The top managers pay more attention to the meeting and the event facilities however for the employees the hotel location and destination are the most essential points when choosing the hotel.

The reason why the answers are different is probably due the several reasons. Firstly, how is the reservation process made within the company and who is managing all the travel processes. Secondly, the importance of the person in the company (e.g. the employee due his position has to be present in the fairs, business meetings, so for him the location is more important than price). And thirdly is the question of who pays the trip, usually the company pays all the business trips, that might be the reason that the price factor is not that important for the employees of the company.

According to the survey findings, it can be summarised that overall the travel experience of the MICE tourism segment visitors in business oriented hotels is positive. None of the respondents had a total negative experience in the hotel. As the MICE

travellers require specific services from the hotel which are more business rather than leisure oriented, those specific services are the main criteria of the hotel evaluation. If the guests of the hotel find all the services and the hotel facilities according to their requirements, they have a positive travel experience of the hotel they stay in.

As the travel experience depends on the services provided by the hotel, the research was concentrated on what services and facilities of the hotel are the most important for business travellers in order to be satisfied with the chosen hotel. The close-ended questions indicated that the most outstanding aspect in the hotel that influences the positive travel experience of the hotel is its services. Another aspect influencing the experience of the hotel is a good catering, especially during the breakfast as in most cases this is the only meal that the travellers have in the hotel. The least popular answers were hotel design, problem solving ability and the staff of the hotel.

To make the research of the travel experience of the MICE travellers in the business oriented hotels series of open-ended questions were designed for the respondent could freely add and point out all the aspects that are important for their satisfaction with the hotel.

The analysis of the results showed that one of the most important aspects service and hotel location, which is very important for the business travellers. Many respondents noted that the Internet connection is very important, even though that nowadays in business oriented hotels free Wifi is a must, in Spain, however where the research was conducted large amount of the hotels charge for the Wifi, moreover the connection is still quite slow. This factor may influence the results, which is also described in a chart of a negative experience of the hotels that respondents stayed during the fair. For the respondents as well is important the hotel room, due the fact that many of them spend time in the room not only sleeping, but also dedicating a time to work. The respondents commented that the room has to be quite and the bed has to be high. Other aspects that influence the travel experience are the nice and welcoming hotel staff. Also the transportation is essential, for the MICE travellers it is important to have easy

transport connections among the hotel and airport, port, railway station, city centre, expo/convention centres and etc.

7.2 Suggestions

In terms of the key findings the author can point out some suggestions for development and improvement. Overall the commissionaire hotel is aware of the market situation and has one of the strongest marketing campaigns within the location. However taking in the consideration the commissionaire party or another hotel interested in attracting more MICE clients the results might be helpful to develop the marketing strategies including all the aspects and services that are discussed in the work.

Based on the analysed results the hotel can see what are the aspects and services important for the MICE travellers and what creates a positive experience of their stay. The following chapter presents the main suggestions based on the research.

Firstly, as the biggest amount of the hotel bookings come from the Internet, the hotel should have an attractive and user friendly web page. The information on the hotel's page should be up to date and provide the customers with the complete information about the hotel and its services. As well all the benefits and special offers should be pointed out for on the hotel's page.

Secondly, the hotel should ensure the quality and comfort of the rooms. The beds in the rooms should be comfortable and clients should be provided with some extras without being charged for it. For example, extra pillows, blankets, towels. Also the client should be informed about the extra services available in the hotel to provide more complete experience.

Thirdly, the hotel should provide convenient transportation services to the clients of the hotel, like airport transfers and connections to the event venues. As the location of the hotel is the factor that cannot be changed the way to solve some inconvenience for the hotel guests is to offer the transfer services and make getting around the city easy and comfortable.

Another suggestion based on the research results is that the Internet connection should be for free and with a high-speed. If the wireless connection is not good in the hotel, the clients should be provided with the cables to connect to the internet. Especially the connection quality is important during the business events in the hotel. The quality of the connection should be double checked before the event and if there are some break downs, should be fixed immediately or offered alternative solution, like connecting with the cables.

As for many people the hotels staff attitude, politeness and problem solving ability brings the first and the last impression, the hotel should pay attention to their staff education and development programs. The hotel staff should be well trained and motivated to perform their best in any position, from the house keepers to the top managers. For some hotels the lack of education and motivation of the hotel staffs brings down all the other positive services provided by the same hotel. The Human Resource department should provide the staff with the continuous trainings, development and education programs.

The last suggestions for the hotel interested to improve their performance and attract more people to stay, is to learn about the clients' feedback of the hotel and its services. The feedback helps to see what is good and what has to be improved in order to satisfy the clients. The feedback can be gathered via surveys handed out in the hotel or by analysing the feedbacks on the Internet via pages such as Tripadvisor.com, Booking.com, etc.

7.3 Thesis process and personal learning outcome

The thesis process overall was well planned and thought through. The thesis writing process required good scheduling to follow in order to carry out all the required steps of the work at the time. The thesis process was planned in advance, however some work process had to be prioritised above others due the timing. For instance, the survey design and conducting was the number one priority before starting the work on actual research of the topic as the survey had to be done during the EIBTM fair in November.

The work on the topic research brought to the author new knowledge and experience. During the work process author learned to analyse large amount of qualitative and quantitative data, use the SPSS program, organize the personal work process. As well author learned about the hospitality industry, business tourism and its importance for the hospitality.

The HAAGA-HELIA Thesis seminars that were held during the process gave an opportunity to an author not only to evaluate others work, but also to get a constructive feedback that affected the improvement processes and quality of the work.

The choice of the topic educated the author and gave an insight of the industry, which is useful for the author and is applied to the current work. Hence the importance of choosing the topic brings an enormous value. As well working on the work author had chance to participate the EIBTM fair. This event was educating and great place to develop the professional network.

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Attachments

1. Survey

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: 18 – 25 26 – 35 36 – 45 46 – 55 56+
3. Country of origin: _____
4. What is your position in your company? Top Management Employee
 Management Line employee
 Consultant Other
5. How often do you travel for MICE purposes a year? less than 10 times 10-20 times
 21- 30 times 31-40 times
 More than 50 times
6. Are the reservations made through a hotel or through a local Destination Management Company?
 Internet Hotel Local DMC
7. What are the main criteria for choosing a hotel?
 Price / Budget Hotel chain / Brand name
 Destination / Location Professionalism of Event Manager
 Meeting & Event facilities Previous Experience
 SPA, Fitness center, swimming pool, casino, tennis court, etc.
 Other _____
8. What is the most outstanding aspect in the hotels? Service Catering
 Hotel design Problem solving
 Personnel Other
What? _____
9. How happy are you with the services of the hotel at which you are staying for MICE purposes?
 Very satisfied Unsatisfied
 Satisfied Not at all satisfied
10. What aspects are good?

11. What can be improved?

12. Name the three most important things for MICE travelers?

13. Do you prefer innovation and new tendencies or traditional services?

New tendencies

Traditional

14. How often do you visit travel fairs?

(15). FOR HOSTED BUYERS. How have you organized meeting in the fair?

Answering the invitation, made through organizers

Looking yourself for hotels presented in the fair catalogue

Making meeting appointments with recommended partners

Participating only in the meetings within a group – a Hosted Buyers Group visit at stand

Additional comments:

If requested, distribution of research results